

LGBTQ Experiences Navigating the Health Care System

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Background

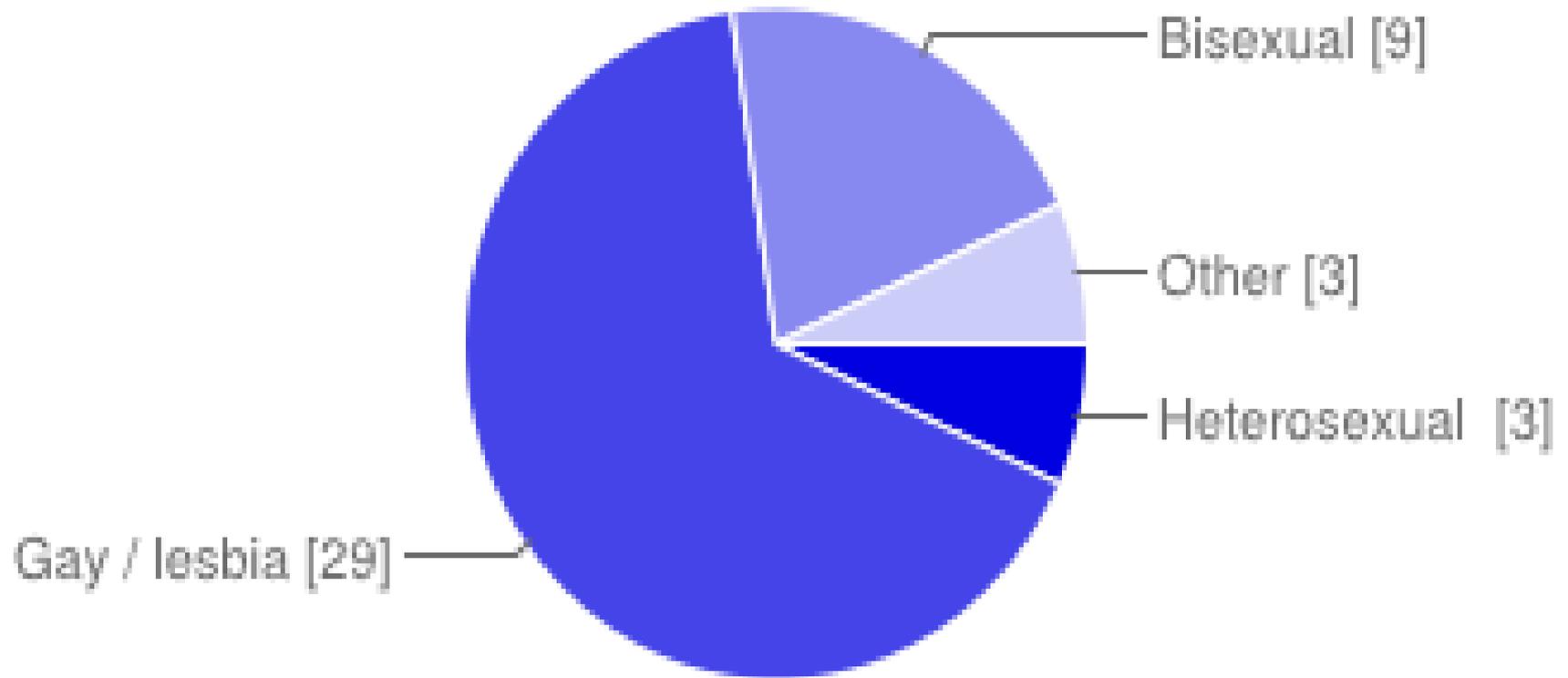
- ▶ To provide context for this workshop we circulated a survey to question the local LGBTQ community's experiences with the health care system
 - ▶ The following is an overview of the responses
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Who responded?

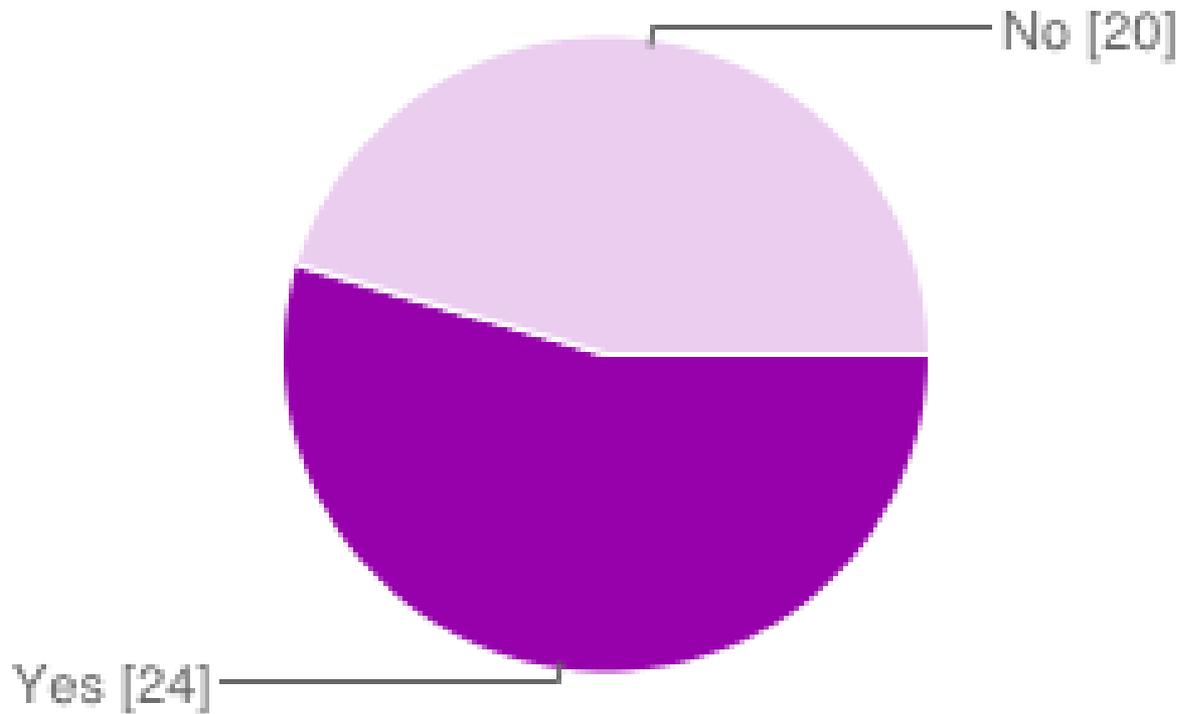
- ▶ 44 respondents
- ▶ 82% from Grenville, Leeds and Lanark Counties
- ▶ Average age: 50
- ▶ Female: 75%
- ▶ Male: 16%
- ▶ Transgender: 7%
- ▶ Other: 2%



Who responded?



In the past year has a health care professional assumed that you are heterosexual and/or cisgendered when you are not?



Have you disclosed your sexual identity/gender identity to your primary health care provider?

- ▶ Yes, I am out to my medical provider and am comfortable discussing my sexuality/gender with my provider: 68%
 - ▶ Yes, I am out to my medical provider but am not comfortable discussing my sexuality/gender with my provider: 14%
 - ▶ No, I do not choose to be out to my medical provider: 14%
 - ▶ I do not currently access a medical provider: 5%
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Do you have confidence and trust in the health care providers treating you?

- ▶ “Yes. I am honest about my orientation and my doctor, who is female, seems to take that into consideration when treating me. However I found it disconcerting when I went in for a procedure at the hospital and was asked by a nurse if my husband was picking me up after. Having to decide whether I should "out" myself is adding stress to an already stressful situation”.
- ▶ “Generally. Providers still assume opposite gender partner, i.e.. ask only about opposite gender sexual activity”.

How would you generalize your experiences accessing health care that are related to your sexual orientation/gender identity?

- ▶ Overwhelmingly positive 14%
- ▶ Mostly positive 77%
- ▶ Mostly negative 9%
- ▶ Overwhelmingly negative 0%



Is the health advice you receive generally relevant and appropriate to your sexual orientation/gender identity?

- ▶ No, my practitioner needs to have more knowledge of and sensitivity to LGBTQ issues: 39%
 - ▶ Yes, my practitioner demonstrates knowledge of and sensitivity to LGBTQ issues: 61%
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Overall, do you feel you are treated with respect and dignity by your health care providers?

- ▶ “My doctor is very open with me in discussions about my health and how it relates to my sexual identity. I mean how could she treat me without understanding my home/work life”?

Do you think the person or people you saw understand how your sexual orientation/gender identity affects other areas of your life?

- ▶ “I would say that most do, but some would not. My job does not allow me to be completely open about who I am, what my orientation really is. So the ones I see on a regular basis would understand. But, I would not necessarily tell all Hospital Emergency staff, but would say so if asked”.
 - ▶ “I don't know. There was a problem, they fixed it, my sexuality didn't seem to matter. Which is how it should be”.
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Do you think the person or people you saw understand how your sexual orientation/gender identity affects other areas of your life?

- ▶ “They're not insensitive they just tend to think all people are the same. On the other hand I don't think LGBTQ people fully understand the degree to which our sexual orientation affects all aspects of our lives. So how can we expect other people to understand this? And especially when the overwhelming message of our campaigns is in fact ‘We're just like you’.”
- ▶ “[This] questionnaire has some bias i.e whether health care advice is relevant/appropriate to my sexual orientation. Most physical health issues are not relevant to orientation, unless however it is mental health”.

Have you ever delayed or avoided seeking services because of your experiences of past discrimination or perceived homophobia/transphobia within the health care system?

- ▶ “Yes. Early on in my transitioning process I applied to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, hoping to get surgeries paid for under OHIP. The questionnaire I was sent was filled with inappropriate questions that I was completely uncomfortable answering, many of which were irrelevant or offensive (like describing the size, shape and function of my genitals). I withdrew from applying because I wasn't even comfortable filling out the questionnaire. Also, I generally avoid seeing doctors I don't know for more routine issues because of discomfort about disclosing certain information or having to face a physical examination by someone I don't know or trust”.

Have you ever delayed or avoided seeking services because of your experiences of past discrimination or perceived homophobia/transphobia within the health care system?

- ▶ “Yes. When I had a family doctor he would never talk to me about sexual health, so I believe he was very uncomfortable which made me very uncomfortable”.

Do you have worries about how you will be treated as an LGBTQ person by health care providers?

- ▶ Yes: 9%
- ▶ No: 45%
- ▶ Sometimes: 45%



Are you satisfied that your health care provider has offered you full information on preventative health care initiatives such as Pap tests, mammography, colorectal screening, etc.

- ▶ “No, as a female I never had a pap test, nor was one ever offered or suggested. I still have never had any form of preventative screening of any kind, or been offered information about any of the above. I don't even know what kind of preventative health care I might require as a trans man”.
- ▶ “My doctor and I work together to keep me healthy, we discuss everything as it pertains to specific testing and screening. She also follows up with me to be sure I understood the testing and results”.

Summary Comments

- ▶ “My overall experience of health care is hard to describe as either good or bad. I have a good family doctor, though I have to travel to access her. Health care that I have sought in relation to my transition was a nightmare, I have very little good to say about any of it. On the other hand, I recently had appendicitis and although that meant disclosing my trans status to quite a number of nurses and doctors, the whole experience was positive, indicating to me that acceptance of LGBTQ people is becoming part of our social consciousness”.

- ▶ “My family physician is in Ottawa and practices in a very open setting. Visiting the emergency in Perth is not as welcoming as the clinic in Ottawa, but I have not experienced any real problems unique to my sexual orientation”.
- ▶ “While my health care providers aren't obtuse -- they "get" working with diverse populations, at least in theory -- there is a mountain of nuance that's missing. The experience of getting quality care, without dealing with occasional ineptitude or feeling like the "other" hasn't really been available and I feel it should be”.